

# WILEY

---

## **The Editors and Board of Trustees of the Russian Review**

---

The Norman Theory of the Origin of the Russian State

Author(s): N. Riasanovsky

Source: *The Russian Review*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Autumn, 1947), pp. 96-110

Published by: Wiley on behalf of The Editors and Board of Trustees of the Russian Review

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/125336>

Accessed: 28-06-2016 06:04 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



*The Editors and Board of Trustees of the Russian Review*, Wiley are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Russian Review*

# The Norman Theory of the Origin of the Russian State

BY N. RIASANOVSKY

## I

NO question in the entire field of Russian history has drawn more attention in historical literature, and has created more controversies than the problem of the origin of the Russian state. Ever since Bayer and Schloetzer stated the problem back in the eighteenth century in terms of extreme Norman influence, a battle has been fought between the Normanists on one side and the anti-Normanists on the other. The former represented a diverse group as far as their claims and the methods were concerned, while the latter usually had nothing in common, except their opposition to Normanism.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this article is not to add another opinion to the already enormous number of opinions on the subject of the origin of the Russian state. Its aim is rather to contribute towards the elimination of the fantastic discrepancy which exists with regard to this problem between the opinions of modern scholars on the one hand, and the obsolete statements one can find in various textbooks and general histories, on the other. While specialists in the field now know that the Scandinavian influence on Russian culture was negligible, general historical works, such as the *Cambridge Medieval History*,

<sup>1</sup>Especially valuable for the history of the controversy are the works of Schloetzer, Bayer, Krug, Kruse, Kunik, Pogodin, Thomsen, Beliaev on the Normanist side, of Lomonosov, Kostomarov, Ewers, Gedeonov, Ilovaisky on the anti-Normanist side. For the present status of the problem see the works of Moshin, Vernadsky, Derzhavin, Grekov, Mavrodin. The *Primary Russian Chronicle*, and some Byzantine and Oriental sources constitute the most important primary material. An interesting exercise for a person who is not acquainted with the subject and who knows only the standard Normanist explanation would be to read J. Brutzkus, "The Khazar Origin of Ancient Kiev," in *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 1944, Volume 22, Parts 1-4. An excellent although by no means exhaustive critical bibliography is provided by V. Moshin, *Varyago-Russkii Vopros in Slavia*, No. 10, 1931, pp. 109-136, 343-379, 501-537.

The latest criticism of Normanism is to be found in V. Riasanovsky, *Obzor russkoi kultury*, Part One, New York, 1947, Chapter Two. I have cooperated with my father in writing this chapter. In case of disagreement my father's opinion prevailed, which accounts for certain differences between the chapter and this article.

continue to speak glibly about Norman foundations of Russian law and government, Norman elements in the Russian language and literature, etc. While Professor Vernadsky, in an attempt to reconcile the Norman origin of the Russian state with the increasing evidence of the early existence of the state of the Rus in southern Russia, develops his own hypothesis of the arrival of the Normans on the shores of the Black Sea by A. D. 740, many books still begin the history of the Russian state with the traditional year A. D. 862. Likewise, in spite of the continuously growing literature on the origin of the name *Rus- Ros- Russia* most of the textbooks remain satisfied with one or another of the obsolete Normanist derivations. These textbooks and general works, merely reflect various early stages of the Normanist controversy, and some of them virtually ignore all the developments in the field since the eighteenth century.

In fact, most of the literature on the subject which is available in western languages, and in English in particular, strikes one as being one-sidedly and extremely Normanist. While many of the leading Normanist works have been written in German, and that of V. Thomsen in English (*The Relations between Ancient Russia and Scandinavia and the Origin of the Russian State*), practically no anti-Normanist works are available in any language but the Russian. Moreover, the few specialists in the field whom one can find in England and the United States, notably N. Beliaev and G. Vernadsky, happen to be Normanists of one kind or another. Their works, which are original contributions to the problem of the origin of the Russian state, often represent specific points of view peculiar to the authors rather than theories generally accepted by modern scholarship. In addition, Anglo-American historical literature has been influenced by numerous western European, especially Scandinavian, authors who usually repeat verbatim the arguments and conclusions of a few Normanist scholars, in particular Kunik, Thomsen, and even Schloetzer, and overwhelm the English reader through repetition. The worst feature of these writers is that they present as "definite," "proved," and "incontestable" issues which are usually indefinite, tenuous, obscure, and controversial.

## II

In the vast and diverse historical literature concerning the Norman theory of the origin of the Russian state, one basic trend is clearly discernible throughout: the gradual loss of the Normanist

positions. The Norman theory, as originally formulated by Bayer and Schloetzer and developed by Muller, Krug, Kruse, Lehrberg, Fraehn, Pogodin and others, claimed that the entire Russian culture—religion, customs, political structure, law, art—owed its origin and the first two centuries of its development to Scandinavians-Normans, who came to Russia in the middle of the ninth century and dominated that land until the middle of the eleventh. This astounding theory could exist only as long as the ignorance of Russian antiquity was practically complete, and as long as there was no native Russian historical school. Gradually, when the evidence against them became overwhelming, the Normanists had to modify their views and curtail their claims. Kunik, Thomsen, and their followers admitted a considerable native Slavic participation in the formation of Russian culture and of the Russian state; they merely claimed that the basic, guiding element and the fundamental institutions were Norman. With subsequent development of Russian historiography even that position became untenable. Contemporary Normanists, e.g. Moshin, speak only of an important Norman participation in the formation of the Russian state. With regard to culture, instead of describing the Kievan law or art as essentially Scandinavian, they make much less definite claims of Norman stimulation of Russian culture through providing political unification or through establishing closer ties with Byzantium.

This shift in the Normanist position was due primarily to the gradual discovery of the extremely important cultural and ethnical background of the Kievan state. Far from being primitive forest dwellers who could be brought to political and cultural life only by the phenomenal energy and ability of the Normans, the Slavs of the Kievan state were found to be the inheritors of centuries of cultural development in southern Russia. The state of Oleg and Sviatoslav was preceded by Cimmerian, Scythian, Sarmatian, Gothic, and Khazar states, which had attained a fairly high degree of cultural life and benefited greatly from their contacts with the Hellenic, Byzantine, and Oriental civilizations. Influences of these states and civilizations can be traced in the language, the art, the customs, and the material culture of Kievan Russia. The very formation of the Kievan state also was the culmination of a centuries-old internal development within Eastern Slavdom. Most of the contemporary scholars regard the Kievan princes as the direct successors of the princes of the Antes of whom we have some record as early as the

fourth century.<sup>2</sup> Although the nature and the level of Eastern Slavic culture at the dawn of Russian history remains difficult to determine, one is not justified in regarding it as lower than that of the Scandinavian Vikings who started coming to Russia in the ninth century. It is worth noting that the Normans who came to Russia were evidently predominantly Swedes, and the Swedes were at the time the least cultured of the three Scandinavian nations.

The greatest cultural centers at the dawn of Russian history were the Byzantine and the Moslem empires, and both of them lay much closer to Kievan Russia than to Scandinavia. As a matter of fact, because a road from Sweden to Byzantium and the Orient lay through Russia, Russia exercised a considerable cultural influence on Scandinavia.<sup>3</sup> The Khazar state from which, according to most Normanists, only the Normans saved and could save the Eastern Slavs, was in many ways more civilized than the Normans themselves (e.g. the Normans were pagans, while the Khazars belonged to the Jewish faith, and their state evidently included a considerable number of Moslems and Christians). In the light of these facts, it is difficult to accept the validity of the claims often made by the Normanists, notably by Kunik and lately by Laehr, that the Normans saved Russia for the West and for civilization.<sup>4</sup> In the ninth century civilization was not on the side of the Normans.

Although it is very difficult to compare the relative cultural standing of the Eastern Slavs and the Scandinavians in the ninth century, the task becomes much easier in the succeeding centuries. Then Kievan Russia became one of the leading European states, both culturally and politically. Its culture was definitely inferior only to that of Byzantium, while Scandinavia still remained on the cultural periphery of Europe. Scandinavian sagas speak of Russia as of a

<sup>2</sup>Of course, the nature, the extent, and the exact significance of the culture inherited by the Kievan state from the preceding states in southern Russia raise many extremely complicated problems. The presence and the great significance of these influences is now, however, undeniable. The best books in English on this subject are M. Rostovtzeff, *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia*, Clarendon Press, 1922 and G. Vernadsky, *Ancient Russia*, New Haven, 1943. The best general work in Russian is B. Grekov, *Kievskaya Rus*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1944.

<sup>3</sup>See, for instance, S. Syromiatnikov, "Drevlyanskii knyaz i varyazhskii vopros" in *Zhurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniya*, New Series, 1912, July, p. 133.

<sup>4</sup>E. Kunik, *Die Berufung der Schwedischen Rodsen durch die Finnen und Slawen*, Volume 2, Leipzig, 1845, pp. 282-284.

G. Laehr, *Die Anfänge des russischen Reiches. Politische Geschichte in 9 u 10 Jahrhundert*. Berlin, 1930, p. 43.

marvellously rich "land of cities." Whether we consider written law and written literature or coin stamping, we have to register their development in Kievan Russia a considerable time before their appearance in Scandinavia.

These few considerations should make it clear that the Normans could not lay the foundations of Russian culture or even exercise a great cultural influence upon Russia. They should also make one very suspicious of general Normanist claims on behalf of Scandinavian influence on Russian law, or a special Norman political ability, or even a superior Norman military organization. Unless concretely proved in specific instances, these claims are really no more valid than the earlier Normanist arguments for the Scandinavian origin of Sviatoslav on the ground that he was a great military leader.

Let us consider then some of the specific claims of Norman influence on Russian culture.

Among these perhaps the most significant is the claim of Scandinavian influence on the Russian language. Bayer, the originator of Normanism, did not know Russian, but thought that he had found a considerable number of Scandinavian words in the Russian language. By the middle of the nineteenth century about fifty Russian words were thought to be of Scandinavian origin. With the development of Russian philology and the investigations of Sreznevsky, Gedeonov, and others, the number of "Norman" words was further reduced. In 1877, Thomsen, a leading Normanist, laid claim to only sixteen. Even that proved to be excessive, and modern Normanists have further reduced the number. Moshin, for instance, has a list of six. It is obvious that some six words out of the total Kievan vocabulary of some ten thousand not only do not speak in favor of two centuries of Norman domination in Russia, but rather argue against the Normanist theory even in its mildest form. More Scandinavian words could be expected to pass into the Russian language through mere geographical proximity. In particular, it is interesting to note that old Russian words pertaining to navigation were often derived from the Greek, but never from the Scandinavian languages. Words dealing with trade were either Oriental or native Slavic.

The Normanists had relatively little to say on the subject of Kievan literature because written literature in Russia preceded written literature in Scandinavia and because the obvious influences in this field were those of Byzantium and Bulgaria. The only consistent claim has been made on behalf of the influence of Scandinavian epic literature on the subject matter of a few of the Russian epics. In

particular, the tales of the death of Oleg, of the vengeance of Olga, and of Solovei Budimirovich are said to have been taken by Russian literature from the Scandinavian. Even these insignificant claims are highly questionable.<sup>5</sup>

Claims of Norman influence on Russian law have suffered a complete fiasco. While two centuries ago Scandinavian law was regarded as the foundation of Russian jurisprudence, by now it has been determined that no elements of Kievan law can be traced back to Norman prototypes. The reasons are obvious: "The Russian Law" of Yaroslav antedates Scandinavian codes of law and was meant for a society both more highly developed and different from that of Scandinavia. The whole matter is worth mentioning only because many books still contain statements to the effect that Norman law influenced Russian law without ever specifying the nature of that influence.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup>As to the tale of Oleg, there is no reason to give priority to the Scandinavian story of Odd; the latter was written down in the fourteenth century, the former in the eleventh. The subject matter, death through a favorite horse, seems to be native to southern Russia rather than to Scandinavia. The parallel development of the two stories indicates influence of the Russian epic on the Scandinavian rather than vice versa. The story of Olga's vengeance, of burning a town by means of obtaining a tribute from it in birds, tying incendiary material to the birds, lighting it and setting the birds free, has been derived by some Normanists from a similar episode in the saga of Harold Hardrada. This, however, is hardly warranted because Olga lived prior to Harold Hardrada and because the specific episode is also to be found in various Western chronicles as well as in Genghiz Khan legends. Perhaps the earliest recorded appearance of the episode is in Titus Livy, in a story about Hannibal. Finally, the Norman origin of Solovei Budimirovich has been deduced from the fact that in the story he came on a ship from across the sea. His patronymic and the general contents of the story testify to the fact that he was a Slav from the Baltic or perhaps the White Sea shores.

<sup>6</sup>"The Russian Law" has also been used by the Normanists to illustrate the alleged gulf in the Kievan society between the Slavic masses and the dominating Normans. Two articles of the code are significant in this connection. In an article dealing with penalties for murder the murder of a *slavyanin* and of a *ruskii lyudin* are specifically mentioned. The penalties for the two, however, are identical. The interpretation of the article hinges on the meaning of the *ruskii lyudin*. It seems that even if we are to accept the originally Norman derivation of *Rus*, by the eleventh century this term and others connected with it, including the *ruskii lyudin*, would refer to the Kievan state of the Rus and not to any Scandinavians. The *slavyanin* mentioned separately from the *ruskii lyudin* is probably ethnically connected with the north of Russia just as the *ruskii lyudin* is with the south. The other article states that the *Varyags* (regarded as Normans by most historians) and the *Kolbyaks* (regarded as Normans by Shakhmatov and a few others; other interpretations—an Eastern or a Finnish ethnic group) require only two supporting witnesses in court instead of the usual number of seven. This particular privilege tends

The Normanists began by asserting an all-important influence of Scandinavian religion on Kievan paganism. Perun, the chief deity of the Eastern Slavic pantheon, was allegedly derived from Thor, and the names of the entire Slavic Olympus were said to have been merely translated from the Norse. This claim, as dubious as it was easy to make because pagan religions are usually highly similar and comparable, was jeopardized by the discovery of a passage in Procopius, a sixth century Byzantine historian, in which the god of thunder is described as the supreme deity of the Antes. At present it is not only difficult to speak of any obvious Norman influence on Kievan paganism, but one has to note that a philological analysis of the Slavic pantheon yields the Iranian Khors, the Oriental Smiregl, and the Finnish Mokosh, but no Norman deity.

The Normanists also speak, and usually very vaguely, about the Norman influence on the organization of the Kievan court, on the clothing and the weapons of Kievan Russians, etc. Most of these statements sound particularly unsubstantiated when compared to the well established historical evidence, showing, for instance, Byzantine influence on the organization of the Russian Church (also some court titles, dresses, etc.), or Oriental influence on the Russian dress.

To sum up, one can safely say that Norman influence on Russian culture was practically negligible. There remains, however, the problem of the creation of the Kievan state and of the part played in it by the Normans. At present, it forms the crux of the Normanist controversy, and to it we shall turn our attention.

### III

The problem of the origin of the Kievan state is very closely connected with the *Rus* because the Kievan state was the state of the *Rus*. The Russian Primary Chronicle under the year A. D. 862 speaks briefly about the arrival of the *Rus* upon the invitation of the quarreling Slavic tribes of the Sloveni and the Krivichi and of some Finnish tribes:

They accordingly went overseas to the Varangian Russes: these particular Varangians were known as Russes, just as some are called Swedes, and others Normans, Angles, and Goths, for they were thus named. The Chuds, the

to indicate only that the Varyags and the Kolbyaks, probably a fluid, commercial element, had some difficulty finding witnesses, and that that was taken into account by the law.



Slavs and the Krivichians then said to the people of Rus "Our whole land is great and rich, but there is no order in it. Come to rule and reign over us!" They thus selected three brothers, with their kinsfolk, who took with them all the Russes and migrated. The oldest, Rurik, located himself in Novgorod; the second, Sineus, in Byeloozero; and the third, Truvor, in Izborsk. On account of these Varangians, the district of Novgorod became known as the land of Rus. The present inhabitants of Novgorod are descended from the Varangian race, but aforetime they were Slavs.<sup>7</sup>

The Normanists accepted the Chronicle verbatim, concluded that the Rus were a Scandinavian tribe or group, and proceeded to identify the *Rus-Ros-Rhos* of other sources with the Scandinavians. However, the problem soon became exceedingly complicated. The Scandinavian Rus could not be found in Scandinavia and was utterly unknown in the West.<sup>8</sup> Although the Chronicle referred primarily to Novgorod, Rus became identified with the Kievan state, and the very name came to designate the southern Russian state as distinct from the north, Novgorod included.<sup>9</sup> Still more important was the discovery that the Rus was known to some Byzantine and Oriental writers long before A. D. 862, and was evidently located in southern Russia. Finally, the Primary Chronicle itself came to be suspected and underwent a searching criticism.

One of the first problems which confronted the Normanists was to find the Scandinavian origin of the name *Rus*. Schloetzer referred to the Swedish district of *Roslagen*, but later it was pointed out that Roslagen acquired its present name only at the end of the thirteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Then the Normanists deduced *Rus* from *Ruotsi*, the Finnish name for the Swedes, which might have originated from the Swedish *rodsin*, *rodsmoen*, *droetsmoen*. The criticism of Lamansky, Gedeonov, and others made Kunik in 1875 abandon the former Swedish derivations of the Finnish *Ruotsi*.<sup>11</sup> He proceeded to derive *Ruotsi* from *Reidgotar*. Thomsen decided that the original word was *roper*,

<sup>7</sup>*The Russian Primary Chronicle, Laurentian Text*. Translated and edited with an introduction by S. Cross. Cambridge, 1930, p. 145.

<sup>8</sup>The mention of *Ros* in the Bertinian Annals in A.D. 839 only demonstrates that the imperial court was not acquainted with the Scandinavian *Ros* and became suspicious when it found out that Swedes were using that name.

<sup>9</sup>True, the Chronicle gives a rather questionable description of how Rus came from Novgorod to Kiev, but it does not explain at all why it disappeared from Novgorod.

<sup>10</sup>J. Ewers, *Kritische Vorarbeiten zur Geschichte der Russen*, 1814, pp. 119-120.

<sup>11</sup>Dorn, *Kaspîi*, supplemented by A. Kunik, 1875. Supplement to *Zapiski Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk*, p. 446.

*ropsmen*.<sup>12</sup> None of these Swedish originals proved to be entirely convincing, and Normanist Shakhmatov, who made a thorough study of the problem, had to conclude that "The origin of the name *Rus* remains obscure, in spite of the persistent efforts of scholars."<sup>13</sup> From the Finnish *Ruotsi* Thomsen and Shakhmatov derived the Russian *Rus* by analogy with *Suomi-sum*. This derivation implies the rather peculiar historical occurrence of one people (the Russians) accepting for themselves the name given to another people (the Swedes) by a third people (the Finns).

Because the Normanists regarded the Rus as a Scandinavian group, they proceeded to interpret all references to the Rus in Norman terms. The Bertinian Annals under the year A. D. 839 tell about the Ros ambassadors, who came to Ingelheim through Constantinople and who were the men of *khakan-Rus*, but who turned out to be Swedes. Some Normanists even concluded that the ambassadors must have come all the way from Sweden and twisted *khakan* to read *Haakon*.<sup>14</sup> But the Russian khaganate was probably located in southern Russia, and the title of khakan suggests Khazar rather than Norman influence. The early date made some Normanists (Shakhmatov, A. Vasiliev) advance the hypothetical arrival of the Scandinavian Rus into Russia from A.D. 862 to "approximately A.D. 840." A slight change in the original chronology also enabled the Normanists to regard as Scandinavians the Rus which staged its first attack on Constantinople and which was described on that occasion by patriarch Photius. In the tenth century bishop Liutprand of Cremona spoke of the *Russios* in his description of the neighbors of the Byzantine empire. A controversy still rages on whether Liutprand described his Russios as Normans or merely as a northern people.<sup>15</sup> Also in the tenth cen-

<sup>12</sup>Thomsen, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>13</sup>A. Shakhmatov, *Drevneishie sudby russkogo plemeni*, Petrograd, 1919, p. 52.

<sup>14</sup>M. Pogodin, "G. Gedeonov i ego sistema o proiskhozhdenii varyagov." In *Zapiski Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk*, volume VI, 1865, pp. 73-84.

<sup>15</sup>The anti-Normanist interpretation seems to be better substantiated than the Normanist. Liutprand writes: "Constantinopolitana urbs habet ab Aquilone Hungaros Pizenacos, Russios, quos alio nomine nos Nortmannos appellamus, atque Bulgaros nimium sibi vicinos." And again "Gens quaedam est sub aquilonis parte constituta, quem a qualitate corporis Graeci vocant rusios, nos vero a positione loci nominamus nordmannos, lingua quippe Teutonum nord aquilo, man autem dicitur homo, unde et nordmannos aquilonares homines dicere possumus. Huius denique gentis rex vocabulo Inger erat, qui collectis mille et eo amplius navibus Constantinopolem venit." (Ewers, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-139). It is more likely that Liutprand used *nordmannos* for geographical rather than for ethnic reasons. In the Middle Ages *nordmannos* did not necessarily denote Scandinavians (Riasanovsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 626-627).

tury Constantine Porphyrogenitus in his *De Administrando Imperio* gave the names of seven Dnieper rapids "in Slavic" and "in Russian." As a group, the "Russian" names can be best explained from Scandinavian languages. This evidence of "the language of the Rus" is rather baffling: there is no other mention of any Scandinavian language of the Rus; on the contrary, the Chronicle itself states that the Slavic and the Russian languages are one. The Normanists were quick to point to the Scandinavian names in the treaties between Kievan Russia and Byzantium. The anti-Normanists challenged the Scandinavian derivation of many of the names, and stressed the fact that the treaties were written in Greek and in Slavic and that the Rus swore by Slavic deities.<sup>16</sup>

Arabic sources also mention and sometimes discuss and describe the Rus. Among them most important are the writings of Masudi, Ibn-Fadlan, Ibn-Khurdadbeh, and Ibn-Rusta. The statements of these authors have been interpreted in many ways by various Normanist and anti-Normanist scholars. In general the Rus of the Arabic authors is a numerous people rather than a Viking detachment ("a tribe of the Slavs" according to Ibn-Khurdadbeh). The Rus has numerous towns, and its ruler bears the title of *khakan*. True, the Rus is often contrasted with the Slavs. In itself, however, this is certainly not a proof of the Scandinavian origin of the Rus. The difference may be simply that between the Slavic Kievan state and the less organized Slavs, north (and sometimes west) of it. There was no concept of Slavic unity in the ninth century. Some of the customs of the Rus, as described by Eastern sources, appear definitely Slavic rather than Norman: such are the posthumous marriage of bachelors, the suicide of wives following the death of their husbands, and human sacrifices. The Rus of the Arabic authors lived most probably somewhere in southern Russia. Although Arabic sources refer primarily to the ninth century, the widespread and well-established relations of the Rus with the Orient at that time appear to testify to the fact that the Rus had already been acquainted with the East over a long period of time, an impossible situation if we are to regard the Rus simply as Normans.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup>The preceding paragraph barely mentions some sources and episodes of early Russian history which became basic for the Normanist controversy. Much material of a lesser significance is not even mentioned. All these matters are discussed at length in almost every book dealing with the origin of the Russian state. Among the most complete analyses are those of Kunik, Gedeonov, Thomsen, Moshin, and Riasanovsky.

<sup>17</sup>Riasanovsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 271-285.

Other indications were found of an early existence of the Rus in southern Russia and of the ancient connection of the name *Rus-Ros* in its various forms with the Russian topography. In the second century A.D., Ptolemy used the word *Rha* to designate the Volga. Later it was referred to as *Ros*, *Rhos*. Gedeonov found over a dozen Slavic rivers the names of which appeared related to *Ros*. *Rousas* were known to an Armenian author of the fifth century, and *Hros* to Zacharias Rhetor (A.D. 555). Knauer pointed out that some Arabic authors knew Rus on the Volga prior to the year A.D. 713. At the end of the eighth century or the very beginning of the ninth the Rus attacked Surozh in the Crimea, and between 820 and 842 A.D. the Rus attacked Amastris on the southern shore of the Black Sea.<sup>18</sup> While the evidence for an early existence of the Rus in southern Russia was increasing, a critical analysis of the Primary Chronicle further challenged the simple derivation of the Rus from the Scandinavian north. In particular, the use of the term *Russes* in the first sentence of the Primary Chronicle came to be regarded by many scholars as a later interpolation. Now there are numerous non-Normanist derivations of the term *Ros-Rus*. Knauer stresses the ancient Aryan background and the name for Volga—*Rha*.<sup>19</sup> Vernadsky refers to the Iranian (Iranian-Slavic) tribe of *Rukhs-As*, *Roxolans*. Marr and some of his followers shifted the emphasis to a still darker past and spoke of the rôle of the Japhetides in the formation of the name and the people of the Rus.<sup>20</sup>

The Normanists reacted in a number of ways to the evidence of the antiquity of the Rus and its intrinsic connection with southern Russia. Sometimes they denied or challenged that evidence. Vasiliev, for instance, took issue with the arguments of Vasilevsky and denied the attacks of the Rus on Surozh and Amastris. The first he classified as apocryphal, the second as referring to the well-known campaign of Igor in A.D. 941.<sup>21</sup> Other Normanists, in order to account

<sup>18</sup>Riasanovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 236. Ewers, *op. cit.*, p. 216 ff. Vernadsky, *op. cit.*, p. 258 ff. S. Gedeonov, *Varyagi i Rus*, St. Petersburg, 1876, pp. 412-422.

<sup>19</sup>F. Knauer, "Der russische Nationalname und die indogermanische Urheimat." In *Indogermanische Forschungen*, 1912-1913, Volume 31, pp. 67-88.

<sup>20</sup>To the reader, who is not a philologist, the philological analysis of Marr and his followers appears much more impressive than the usually superficial constructions of the Normanists. For the extreme use of the former approach in dealing with the origin of the Russian state see N. Derzhavin, *Proiskhozhdenie russkogo naroda*, Moscow, 1944. The book has a number of obvious shortcomings from the historical standpoint.

<sup>21</sup>To appreciate the two sides of the controversy one should read V. Vasilevsky,

for all the events at the dawn of Russian history and to connect them with the Scandinavian north, postulated two and sometimes even three separate Scandinavian Rus (sometimes designating rather arbitrarily one Rus as Danish, another as Swedish). Their extremely complex and unverified schemes are unnecessary, unless one is to assume that the Rus could be nothing but Scandinavians. Vernadsky, in his reconstruction of the early period of Russian history, brought the Normans to the Black Sea shores as early as A.D. 740. His arguments are highly hypothetical, and his reasoning has not been generally accepted.

At the present time most specialists in the field of early Russian history think that the Normans formed merely one of the elements of the Rus, which was fundamentally connected with the natives of southern Russia and their gradual economic and political evolution. As to the philological derivation of the term *Rus*, a number of scholars are now inclined to accept the remarkable compromise solution offered by Brim. Brim recognized both the appearance of *Rus* from Scandinavia (through *Ruotsi*) and the southern derivation of *Ros*.<sup>22</sup> The two different forms still coexist, e.g. *ruskii* (Russian) from *Rus*, *Rossia* (Russia) from *Ros*. Brim's theory has a strong appeal because of its inclusiveness, but it suffers from its dependence on the coincidental appearance of *Rus* and *Ros*, an unlikely coincidence because either of the two forms can be easily derived from the other.

In their discussion of the Scandinavian rôle in the formation of the Russian state, the Normanists emphasize the Scandinavian names of many representatives of the Rus in the treaties between Rus and Byzantium, and the Scandinavian origin of the Russian dynasty. The latter assertion is based principally on the Primary Chronicle and on the Norman names of the first Russian rulers (up to and excluding Sviatoslav).<sup>23</sup> By now the Primary Chronicle

"The Lives of St. George of Amastris and St. Stephen of Surozh" in *Collected works*, Volume three, 1915 and the chapter "The Life of George of Amastris and the Life of Stephen of Surozh" in A. Vasiliev, *The Russian Attack on Constantinople in 860*, Cambridge, 1946. For a criticism of Vasiliev's views see Riasanovsky, *op. cit.*, Appendix I.

<sup>22</sup>V. Brim, "Proiskhozhdenie termina Rus." In *Rossia i Zapad*, vol. I, 1923.

<sup>23</sup>Of course, the origin of the personal names of early Russian history has been bitterly disputed by various Normanists and anti-Normanists. One should see the article of Brutzkus mentioned above for one unorthodox view. The Normanist position in this case seems to be rather strong. There is, however, a pressing need for a new analysis of the names. Moshin, for instance, refers back to Thomsen, and Thomsen back to Kunik, that is to 1845. Kunik himself later saw the need for a new analysis and regarded his own as deficient and incomplete.

has been analyzed and criticized by numerous scholars. The most thorough critical analysis was made by Shakhmatov, himself a Normanist.<sup>24</sup> The critics threw new light on the obvious inadequacies of the narrative and discovered new failings in it. The suspiciously peaceful establishment of Riurik and his brothers in northern Russia was related to similar Anglo-Saxon and Irish stories, in particular to a passage in Widukind, to indicate, in the opinion of some, the mythical character of the entire "invitation of the Varangians." The fact that, due to considerations of age, Igor could hardly have been Riurik's son was demonstrated to have been just one of the difficulties the chronicler had in tying Novgorod and Kiev together. It was further pointed out that no Kievan sources anterior to the Primary Chronicle (early twelfth century) knew of Riurik.<sup>25</sup> In tracing the ancestry of Kievan princes they usually stopped with Igor. The Primary Chronicle is no longer regarded as a naive factual narrative, but rather as a work written with a definite tendency and probably for definite dynastic purposes. On the other hand, the Normanists argue rather plausibly that the Chronicle is still our best source concerning the origin of the Russian state and that its story, although incorrect in many details, is nevertheless an essentially faithful reflection of actual occurrences. There has been a considerable shift of opinion against Shakhmatov's extreme criticism.<sup>26</sup> At present most scholars believe that the first Russian dynasty of Igor, Vladimir, and Yaroslav was of Norman origin. It should be noted that the story of the calling of the Varangians does not become invalid even if we are to consider the Rus as belonging to southern Russia, and the contradictory references to the Rus in the Chronicle as later interpolations.

The lack of a Norman influence on Russian culture strongly suggests that at the dawn of Russian history the rôle of the Norman element, ruling or otherwise, was rather limited. There is no reason to believe that the institution of principedom was brought to Russia by the Normans. There are mentions of Antic princes going back to the fourth century. Kiy, Shchok, and Khoriv, the mythical founders of

<sup>24</sup>See the following works of A. Shakhmatov. "Skazanie o prizvanii varyagov." In *Izvestiya otdeleniya russkogo yazyka i slovesnosti Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk*. Volume IX, 1904. Book IV, pp. 284-365. *Razyskaniya o drevneishikh letopisnykh svodakh*, St. Petersburg, 1908. *Drevneishie sudby russkogo plemeni*, Petrograd, 1919.

<sup>25</sup>Riasanovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

<sup>26</sup>See, for instance, V. Mavrodin, *Obrazovanie drevnerusskogo gosudarstva*, Leningrad, 1945, pp. 66-67 and Cross, *op. cit.*, Introduction.

Kiev, are variously connected with the Turkish peoples, the Bulgars, the Khazars, the Magyars (especially through their sister Lybed), but certainly not with the Normans. In the tenth century Igor fought against Mal, a prince of the tribe of the Drevlians. Treaties of Oleg and Igor with Byzantium mention local princes.

The Scandinavian element in Russia disappeared rather quickly. Treaties with Byzantium were written in Greek and in Slavic, and the Rus swore by Slavic deities to observe them. If the Norman element had been considerable, only its rapid Slavonization can explain the fact that it left no imprint on Russian culture and that the very existence of the great Russian kingdom ruled by Scandinavians passed unnoticed in Scandinavian literature. One certainly can not speak of the "two centuries of Norman domination" or of "the Swedish colonization" of Russia.

Opinion concerning the historical rôle of the Kievan princes has undergone a gradual but fundamental change. The older estimate, brilliantly developed by Kliuchevsky, which described the princes as above all leaders of military and trading expeditions and which laid an extremely heavy emphasis on the rôle of commerce and towns, has been largely replaced by the new view, best expounded by Grekov, which considers the Kievan princes and their immediate followers as the highest stratum of a gradually evolving society with an emphasis on agriculture and landed property. The Norman theory of the origin of the Russian state fits the former scheme much better than the latter.

#### IV

The Norman theory of the origin of the Russian state began as a flat assertion of an all-important Scandinavian rôle in the creation of Russia. The Slavs, it was claimed, provided merely the raw material, the Normans contributed the entire political and cultural element. From the very beginning of the discussion, the anti-Normanists rose to challenge the Normanist claims and often to deny any Scandinavian rôle in the formation of the Russian state. Two centuries of scholarship have demonstrated that the Norman influence on Russian culture was negligible, that Eastern Slavic history is much older and much richer than Schloetzer ever dreamt, that numerous non-Norman influences (e.g., of Byzantium and of the Oriental peoples of the steppes) were shaping Russian history for centuries prior to the arrival of the Normans and continued to do so long after the Normans were dissolved in the Slavonic mass. It also became

increasingly evident that the Normans had very little to contribute to Russia. The Russian state was created by centuries of history and by the numerous influences some of which were mentioned above, rather than by three Varangian brothers and their followers. Still the Normanists are correct in pointing out the presence of the Scandinavian element in Russia in the ninth, the tenth, and the eleventh centuries. They stress the Norman origin of the dynasty, the presence of Scandinavians as representatives of the Rus in Constantinople and Ingelheim, the catalytic nature of Norman activity on the great Russian plain. These then are the present limits of the controversy. Future studies should try to establish to what extent the Normans "determined the time and the geographical outline of the ancient Russian state"<sup>27</sup> and to what extent they represented merely a minor or even a superfluous element in the formation of that state.

<sup>27</sup>Mavrodin, *op. cit.*, p. 386.